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ABSTRACT

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Assessment measured student knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions at the fourth grade level. This publication describes fourth graders' performance based on 30 questions from the fourth-grade assessment. Twenty-three of the thirty questions were multiple choice. The remaining seven were constructed response questions that required students to write their answers. The goal of the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment was to measure how well U.S. youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities. The framework for the 1998 Civics Assessment specifies three interrelated components which, taken together, reflect broad civic competency: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. The assessment was designed to evaluate students' ability to recall specific information, make inferences based on a written passage or graphical stimulus, or perform more analytical/evaluative tasks, such as distinguishing opinion from fact or defending a position. (Author/BT)

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NAEPFACTS

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Civics: What Do 4th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?

***Abstract**: The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Assessment measured students' knowledge, their intellectual and participatory skills, and their civic dispositions. This issue of* NAEPfacts *describes 4th-graders' performance on 30 questions from the 4th-grade assessment.*

The goal of the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment was to measure how well American youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities. One way to obtain an understanding of the range of student performance is to look at individual questions on the assessment and the percentage of students who gave a correct response to those questions.

The assessment administered to grade 4 students included 90 questions. Thirty of these questions, together with student performance data, scoring information, and additional data, are available at the NAEP website (**http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/**).

This issue of *NAEPfacts* arranges these 30 questions in order of difficulty, as determined by the percentage of 4th-grade students who answered them correctly. These 30 questions provide examples of student performance but do not give a representative sample of the complete range of questions on the assessment. NCES is unable to release enough questions to provide a fully representative sample. Most questions must be kept confidential so that they can be reused on future assessments, permitting comparability of results for the assessments.

The framework for the 1998 civics assessment specifies three interrelated components which, taken together, reflect broad civic competency: *knowledge; intellectual and participatory skills;* and *civic dispositions.* Each assessment question has a knowledge and intellectual skills component. Some of the questions also measure participatory skills and/or civic dispositions.

The questions required 4th-graders to answer questions based on a variety of materials. The assessment was designed to evaluate students' ability to recall specific information, make inferences based on a written passage or graphical stimulus (e.g., a political cartoon or a photograph), or perform more analytical or evaluative tasks such as distinguishing opinion from fact or defending a position.

For example, students were shown a picture of the Statue of Liberty and were asked if it was "a symbol of A) power B) equality C) intelligence D) liberty." Ninety-one percent recognized that "D" was the correct answer. Frequently, students would be asked several questions on a single topic. For example, students were asked three questions about the difference between a "rule" in a movie theater that prevented patrons from bringing their own food and a "law" that limited the number of people who could enter the theater.

Twenty-three of the 30 released questions are multiple-choice questions with four possible answers. This means that students had one chance in four of getting these questions right, merely by guessing.

The remaining seven sample questions are "constructed-response" questions, which require students to write their answers. It is harder for students to get these questions right by guessing. Short constructed-response questions have three possible scores—"Complete," "Partial," and "Unacceptable." Extended constructed-response questions have four possible scores—"Complete," "Acceptable," "Partial," and "Unacceptable."

For purposes of this analysis, only "Complete" and "Acceptable" answers to extended constructed-response questions are reported. For short constructed-response questions, only "Complete" answers are reported.

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Note: The following chart gives summary descriptions of 30 sample questions from the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment for the fourth grade, arranged by the percentage of students who answered them correctly, from the highest to the lowest. Multiple-choice questions are identified by an "(MC)" at the end of the question. For these questions students were choosing the "best" answer available, which was not necessarily the answer they would have given themselves. Each constructed-response question includes the full text of a student's answer that received a "Complete" score, with students' grammatical and other errors left unchanged.

100%

91 percent of students could identify this statue as a symbol of "liberty." (MC)

77 percent knew that citizens of the United States who are at least 18 years old have the right to vote. (MC)

75 percent knew that in the United States, people who are arrested have the right to talk to a lawyer. (MC)

73 percent knew that one important reason why many people in the United States might want to lower taxes is to help families save more money. (MC)

69 percent knew that one way a person can become a United States citizen is by living legally in the United States for five years and passing a special test. (MC)

78 percent recognized that "They work together to keep peace in the world" means that the representatives to the United Nations talk to each other to try to solve problems without fighting. (MC)

77 percent knew that July 4 is a national holiday that celebrates the day when the American colonies declared their independence. (MC)

75%

74 percent knew that in the United States laws must be applied to everyone equally. (MC)

70 percent understood that a student concerned that the playing fields at her school have become littered with trash could best show her civic responsibility by organizing local scout troops to clean up the playing fields. (MC)

69 percent knew that the purpose of the United Nations is to promote international peace and security. (MC)

68 percent could recognize that the most democratic way for a 4th-grade class, given the opportunity to prepare its own lunch, to decide on the menu would be to have the students make a list of their favorite foods and vote on what to serve. (MC)

66 percent understood that the phrase "I pledge allegiance to the flag" in the Pledge of Allegiance means "I promise to be loyal to the ideals of the United States." (MC)

62 percent understood that the fire inspector limits the number of people who are allowed in a movie theater at one time to protect the safety of the people in the theater. (MC)

55 percent knew that one important reason why some people might want to have taxes raised is to help pay for education. (MC)

48 percent gave either a "Complete" (30 percent) or an "Acceptable" (18 percent) answer to a question that asked students to imagine that they owned a theater. Students were to propose either a rule (such as one prohibiting customers from bringing their own food) or a law (such as one limiting the number of persons who could occupy a room) and explain why they wanted that rule or law. A student who received a score of "Complete" answered "My rule is keep your feet off the seats. I want the rule so others can see."

50%

67 percent gave either a "Complete" (26 percent) or an "Acceptable" (41 percent) answer to a two-part question about police officers. Students were first asked "what is wrong" with the ideas of a student who wanted to be a police officer because "the police get to wear fancy uniforms with badges, use handcuffs, and drive cars as fast as they want." They were then asked to give two good reasons for being a police officer. A student who received a score of "Complete" answered to the first part of the question that "It's not just wearing fansy uniforms the job is to keep people safe" and responded to the second part by writing "1) you get to help your country. 2) You get to hepl keep people safe from crimanals."

65 percent understood that members of city councils make local laws. (MC)

58 percent understood that a movie theater does not allow you to bring food into a theater because the owners of the theater want you to buy the food they sell inside. (MC)

49 percent understood that the most important reason why the United States trades with other countries is that it helps people get the things they need. (MC)

47 percent knew that in democracies citizens elect people to make laws for them because it is easier than having everyone vote on every decision. (MC)

45 percent recognized that both citizens and noncitizens in the United States are legally entitled to have the protection of our laws. (MC)

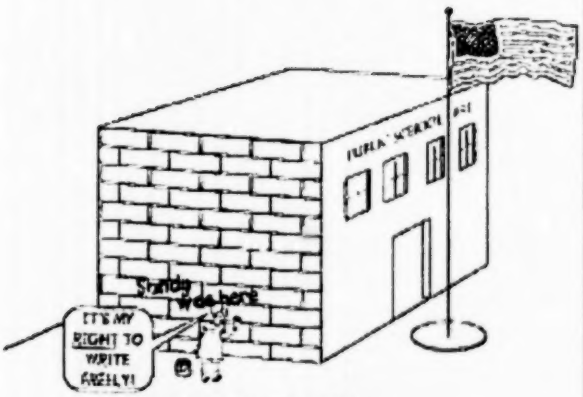
43 percent knew that the President's role in making laws is to sign congressional bills into law. (MC)

38 percent gave either a "Complete" (16 percent) or an "Acceptable" (22 percent) answer to a question asking them to explain why a sign in a movie theater prohibiting customers from bringing their own food into the theater was an example of a rule rather a law. A student who received a score of "Complete" answered "a law is what a government makes and a rule is what a person makes."

25%

24 percent knew that the three parts of the federal government are legislative, executive, and judicial. (MC)

15 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to name two services government pays for with taxes. A student receiving a "Complete" score wrote "1) Road repairing and 2) Education."



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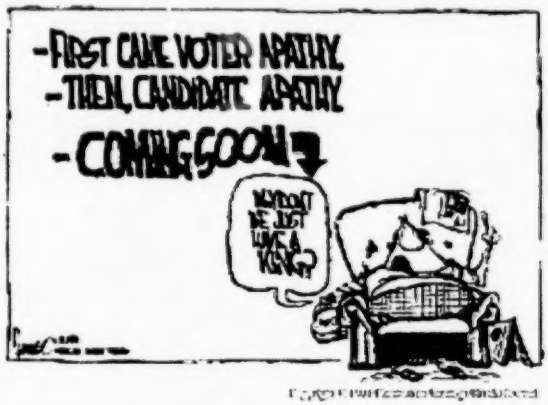
0%

38 percent understood that people who are legal residents of the United States but not citizens can own property. (MC)

26 percent correctly interpreted the message of the cartoon below to mean that democracy could be in danger if people do not vote. (MC)



8 percent received a "Complete" score when asked whether a voting system that allows students to "vote" by putting nickels in a jar should be considered "democratic." A student who gave a "Complete" answer wrote "No, because some people probable don't have any nickles."

7 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to identify and explain "the most democratic way" of selecting a book to be read aloud in class. A student who gave a "Complete" answer wrote "What ever book that has the must votes will be the book that they read out loud" and that "This will be the must democratic way because what ever book that has the must people voting for it."

5 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to describe the "message" of the cartoon opposite. A student who gave a "Complete" answer wrote "It's that some people think they're free to do anything they want to but theres somethings people just cant do. Like writing on the side of a school, you could write on paper."

For Further Information

The NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card, NCES 2000–457, is the complete report.

Civics: What Do 8th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?, NCES 2001–462, and *Civics: What Do 12th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?*, NCES 2001–461, are companion issues of *NAEPfacts*. Single copies are available free from ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, Md. 20794–1398.

The text of the Report Card, the companion *NAEPfacts*, and additional information about the Civics Assessment, including sample questions, may be obtained from the NAEP World Wide Web Home Page (see below).

The Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress. National Assessment Governing Board, Washington, DC. (1996) Copies may be obtained over the World Wide Web at **(http://www.nagb.org/pubs/civics.pdf)**

NAEPfacts briefly summarize findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The series is a product of the National Center for Education Statistics, Gary Phillips, Acting Commissioner, and Peggy Carr, Associate Commissioner for Education Assessment. This issue of *NAEPfacts* was prepared by **Carol Johnson** of NCES and **Alan Vanneman** of the Education Statistics Services Institute, based on previously published material.

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